

Washington Association of Building Officials
Technical Code Development Committee
Jonathan C. Siu, PE, SE; Chair
P.O. Box 7310
Olympia, Washington 98507-7310

October 5, 2009

Washington State Building Code Council
Peter D. DeVries, Chair
P.O. Box 42525
Olympia, Washington 98504-2525

Re: 2007 Proposed Amendments

Dear Mr. DeVries and Councilmembers:

On behalf of the Washington Association of Building Officials' Technical Code Development Committee (WABO TCD), thank you for the opportunity to present comments on the 2009 Washington State Building Codes. By way of explanation, the WABO TCD is made up of members from WABO who are interested in participating in code development at the state and national levels. The committee has been granted authority from WABO's Executive Board to represent WABO's positions on code issues in those forums. However, since WABO is a diverse group with diverse opinions on code issues, unless the WABO membership has actually taken a formal vote on an issue (as is the case on the first item below), we have chosen to put our positions forward as representative of the TCD only, not WABO as a whole.

With that explanation, the WABO TCD's comments on the 2009 Washington State Building Codes follow. Some of these were presented in oral testimony at the hearings in Renton and Spokane, but are reiterated here for your reference.

1. IRC Section R102.5 – The WABO TCD and the WABO membership as a whole recommend adoption of the proposal to move the requirement for residential sprinklers to the appendix, but allow for local adoption of the appendix without SBCC review. WABO believes that these far-reaching policy choices should be made at the local level. There are many local stakeholders who should be involved in making such a decision, such as the local water purveyor, the local fire department, the local building department, the local builders, and the policy-makers in local government (politicians). If the local stakeholders have been involved, the State should not be interfering in that process. WABO believes that this proposal is a good compromise between the "all-or-nothing-in-Washington" approaches being taken by the proponents and opponents of residential sprinklers.

2. IRC Appendix S – The WABO TCD recommends the appendix be revised to allow sprinkler systems that comply with Appendix R. Suggested language is shown below. Appendix R includes two alternative sprinkler systems: NFPA 13D, which is the standard for one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses; and the multipurpose sprinkler system, which is a lower-cost alternative to the NFPA sprinkler standard. The multipurpose sprinkler system proposed as Appendix R of the Washington State Residential Code is found in the body of the International Residential Code. IRC Section R313.2.1 requires compliance with NFPA 13D or Section 2904, so our proposed revision is consistent with the model code.

WAC 51-51-60107 Appendix S--Fire sprinklers. The provisions contained in this appendix are not mandatory unless specifically referenced in the adopting ordinance.

AS107.1 Fire sprinklers. An approved automatic fire sprinkler system shall be installed in new one-family and two-family dwellings and townhouses in accordance with Appendix R ~~Section 903.3.1 of the 2009 International Building Code~~.

3. WSEC Section 503.10.1 – This section prohibits ducts in walls, floors, or ceilings from displacing required insulation. The WABO TCD recommends that this proposal be disapproved. While the requirement may be easily accomplished in floors and ceilings, this will essentially prohibit ducts in exterior walls less than 8 or 10 inches thick. A second requirement in the proposal prohibits building cavities from being used as ducts. This apparently would prohibit return air cavities and the installation of wiring or plumbing that penetrates through the ducts. A better solution might be to require the sealing of all penetrations into the cavity, to prevent air infiltration.
4. WSEC Section 505.1 – The WABO TCD recommends that the change to this section that requires 50% of luminaires be high-efficiency lamps be disapproved. The TCD believes that this is unenforceable, as it would require the jurisdictional inspectors to count individual lamps. In many cases, this will involve opening up already-assembled fixtures in order to see the bulbs. In jurisdictions without electrical inspection programs, untrained jurisdictional inspectors may be exposed to live parts. In the face of reduced staffing and budgets as well as legislative scrutiny, the jurisdictional inspectors are already hard-pressed to accomplish their inspections, and this added burden will likely be one of the items that will not get enforced in order to preserve time to conduct other needed inspections. It is also unenforceable once construction is complete, since anyone can change the lamps once the building is occupied.
5. WSEC Chapter 9 – The WABO TCD recommends approval of this proposal to adopt this new chapter, along with the corresponding changes to Sections 401.1 and 501.1. The TCD believes this will help achieve additional energy savings and

is relatively easily achievable, yet preserves flexibility in providing options to comply with the provisions.

6. WSEC Section 1132.3 – This proposal lowers the threshold at which all lighting fixtures in an existing space must be replaced from 60% of existing fixtures being replaced to 20%. This includes replacing ballast and lamps. The WABO TCD recommends disapproval of both parts of this proposal, as the extremely low threshold would place an unreasonable financial burden on the owners or lessees of a tenant space. This may cause them to do nothing, rather than upgrade the few fixtures in their plans, which would result in the loss of potential energy savings.
7. WSEC Section 1314.6 – This proposal would require a 7 foot deep vestibule at all building entrances that separate conditioned spaces from the exterior. The WABO TCD recommends disapproval of this proposal. The TCD believes its application is unclear in cases such as strip malls, where the entire building is likely to be more than 1,000 square feet in area, but the tenant space entries could be considered “building entrances,” and imposition of a vestibule of such a size would be a burden to the tenants. The TCD also notes that Exception 3 (the 1,000 square foot building exception) will, as a practical matter, be only used in very rare cases if at all, since a 1,000 square foot commercial building is so small as to be highly unlikely.

Again, the WABO TCD appreciates the opportunity to comment on the code amendment proposals, and thanks you for your consideration of them.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Jonathan C. Siu, PE, SE; Chair
Technical Code Development Committee
Washington Association of Building Officials